The 'violence' phenomena reflected on drawings of school-Age children in North Cyprus

Enil Afsaroglu Eren*, European University of Lefke, Lefke, North Cyprus
Zihniye Okray, European University of Lefke, Lefke, North Cyprus

Abstract

Children are an important group who are exposed to violence in various ways in the family, at school, in virtual environment, via television, in their country and in health system. Research sample is a group of 10–11 years old girl and boys at public and private school. In paintings, violence perpetrators are mostly adult males. Nearly, 50% of victims are female, 46.4% of are male, 57% of victims are children and 39.2% of are adults. In drawings of children in private schools, violence phenomena is mostly pictured at parks and garden area. In drawings of children in public school, the violence is pictured in their homes besides park and garden area. The children at public school pictured more tools of violence (gun and knife) in their drawings. The majority of children who draw guns are girls. The gathered results contribute to understanding the emotional and social level of the children in Northern Cyprus.

Keywords: Child, children's drawings, violence.

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* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Enil Afsaroglu Eren,** European University of Lefke, Lefke, North Cyprus.
E-mail address: eafsaroglu@eul.edu.tr / Tel.: +0-000-000-0000

1. Introduction

Drawings are one of the most effective methods for understanding children's emotional background, identifying their needs and enabling the communication with them. From the children's drawings, one can understand their inner worlds, unconscious processes, emotions and socio-cultural indicators which affect them. The significance of drawing in understanding children's psychological background has been mentioned since 1930's. In recent years, the significance of children's drawings has increased in the field of psychology (Malchiodi, 2005).

Violence is one of the traumatic experiences which leaves permanent mark on child in emotional and developmental sense. Children are an important group who are at risk of experiencing and witnessing the violence phenomena. One of the important description of violence is stated by World Health Organization (WHO): *'the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation'* (WHO, 2002).

Children are 'neglected' victims who are witnessing domestic violence or violence in their environment, in their living space, in media and the violence in their cultural surroundings in a visual or audial way. Unfortunately, this fact is mostly ignored in our society. Children's witnessing violence in their homes, at school, via television, in their country is a child abuse. One of the reasons for this is that even the social classes whose awareness level expected to be high has not recognised the types of violence and abuse.

It is possible to study the violence towards children in five groups as follows:

1. Physical (bodily) violence

2. Emotional violence

3. Neglect

4. Sexual violence

5. Domestic violence (Kinderschutz-Zentrum Berlin, 2009).

Most of the time, children are exposed to multiple violence type at the same time. It is possible to distinguish the violence type as direct and indirect. If the violence is directed to the child, it is experienced in a direct way; if it is between the adults and the child witnesses the violence, it is experienced in an indirect way. Physical, sexual, emotional violence and child neglect cause the children to experience violence directly, witnessing the violence via media, in their culture, in the family between the adults cause them to experience it indirectly (Kinderschutz-Zentrum Berlin, 2009).The most fundamental needs of the children and the adolescent are on-going, unchanging, affectionate relationships, physical health and trust; personal experience; developmentally suitable experiences; limit setting and structure; solid and supportive relations and a safe future (Brazelton and Greenspan, 2008). None of the family, school or the environment which in holds violence can fulfil these basic needs. In North Cyprus, a study has not been conducted on the subject of how children perceive violence. When referring to the research studies, conducted in other countries related to this subject, one can see that mostly quantitative researches are included. While, these studies providing important and fundamental information, the researchers' obliging participants to answer the questions is an important obstacle we come face to face (Bosacki, Marini & Dane, 2006). While studying the children's perception of violence besides quantitative researches including qualitative

evaluations will provide us deeper knowledge of concerning the subject. In some of the studies related with this subject, we can see that narratives and drawings are examined and analysed in a qualitative way (Bosacki et al., 2006; Rezo and Bosacki 2003).

2. Method

The research sample was composed of 10–11 years old girls and boys randomly chosen from schools. Data are gathered from both various public schools (33 children, 66%) which represent middle socio-economic class and from private schools (17 children, 34 %) which represent higher level middle socio-economic class. Nearly, 50 children in total, 23 girls (46%) and 27 boys (54%) took part in this study.

The reason for choosing this age group is that their attention span and their awareness level start to increase, their interests have more realistic aspect now and they have wider logical reasoning competence compared with the stages before. In this stage, the children's way of thinking is connected to the visual reality and they can only reason about direct personal experiences (Siegler, DeLoache & Eisenberg, 2005).

The children were asked to draw a picture about violence to specify their violence related experiences. And they were asked to write shortly about what their drawings describe on back of the drawing paper. Later, they were given a drawing paper and crayons to draw their pictures. The narratives that the children wrote on the back of the paper to explain their drawings are used by the researchers to evaluate their drawings. In order not to be influenced by each other the children sat separately. All of the children completed their drawings approximately in 1 hour. Then, the pictures were collected and analaysed. In pictures, the researchers focused on the location and topic of the violence, perpetrator's and victim's characteristics and the other drawings. The pictures were examined and done content analysis by two researchers. Data were analysed using SPSS package.

3. Results

Results of the study in content analysis considered in themes such as 'topic of violence', 'type of violence', 'location of violence', 'tools of violence', 'characteristics of perpetrator' 'characteristics of victim', 'the violence against children reflected in pictures', 'human figure in pictures', 'other drawings in the pictures'.

Table 1. The distribution according to the topic of violence

The topic of violence	*n*	*%*
Domestic violence	18	36
Traffic	4	8
Terror	1	2
Violence experienced between adults outdoors	10	20
Violence directed at animals	2	4
Violence among peers	15	30

The violence incidents expressed in the drawings are mostly experienced in the family, among peers and between the adults outdoors. Traffic, terror and violence directed at animals are also reflected on the drawings.

In the drawings of children participated in the study generally includes the topics such as father committing physical and/or verbal violence on his spouse or children in the family, older sibling committing violence on younger sibling are involved. Following this, peer violence is also expressed.

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And also a child's beating, kicking, spitting and swearing to another child is emphasised. After that, a successful girl mocking a girl who is unsuccessful and unsuccessful child shooting the successful one with a gun took part in the drawings. Then, the violence between adults outdoors is pictured. Some of the children draw pictures about the violence directed at animals. There are also drawings including the violence related with terror and actors/actresses.

3.1. The types of violence

The children mentioned the different types of violence. Even most of them pictured physical violence, verbal and emotional abuse is also pictured by some of them.

Table 2. The distribution of drawings according to type of violence

The type of violence	Physical abuse *n* (%)	Verbal abuse *n* (%)	Physical and verbal abuse *n* (%)	Undefined *n* (%)
Public school	24 (72.7)	5 (15.2)	2 (6.1)	2 (6.1)
Private school	9 (52.9)	7 (41.2)	1 (5.9)	0

x^2: 0.182, df: 3, $p < 0.05$.

The significant relationship between the type of violence and the type of school is indicated by Chi-square (0.18 > 0.05). In both school types, the children draw more pictures with violence topic. However, the number of drawings with verbal violence in private school is really close to the number of drawings with physical violence.

Table 3. The distribution of the drawings' type of violence according to gender

The type of violence	Physical *n* (%)	Verbal *n* (%)	Physical and verbal *n* (%)	Undefined *n* (%)
Female	11 (47.8)	8 (34.8)	2 (8.7)	2 (8.7)
Male	22 (81.5)	4 (14.8)	1 (3.7)	0

x^2: 0.070, df: 3, $p < 0.05$.

The significant relationship between the type of violence and gender is indicated by chi-square (0.07 > 0.05). The boys reflected types of physical violence on their drawings more than girls.

3.2. The location of violence

The location is pictured generally as outdoors. The others are pictured in order of home, school and traffic. In some of the drawings, the location is undefined.

Table 4. Distribution of the location of violence according to school type

	Park,garden	Home	Shopping place	School	Traffic	Undefined
	n (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)
Public school	15 (45.5)	6 (18.2)	0	2 (6.1)	1 (3)	9 (27.3)
Private school	8 (47.1)	0	1 (35.5)	0	2 (11.8)	6 (35.3)

x^2: 0.171, df: 5, *p* < 0.05.

The significant relationship between the location of violence and the type of school is indicated by chi-square (0.07 > 0.05).

In drawings of children in private schools, violence phenomena is mostly pictured at parks and garden area. In drawings of children in public school, the violence is pictured in their homes besides park and garden area.

Table 5. Distribution of the location of violence according to gender

	Park garden	Home	Shopping place	School	Traffic	Undefined
	n (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)
Female	14 (60.9)	3 (13)	1 (4.3)	0	0	5 (21.7)
Male	9 (33.9)	3 (11.1)	0	2 (7.4)	3 (11.1)	10 (37)

x^2: 0.131, df: 5, *p* < 0.05.

The significant relationship between the location of violence and gender is indicated by chi-square (0.131 > 0.05). The violence experienced at school and at traffic is only reflected in boys' drawings.

3.3. The violence tools

Table 6. Distribution of violence tools according to school type

	Gun	Knife	No tools
	n (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)
Public school	5 (15.2)	1 (3)	27 (81.7)
Private school	1 (5.9)	2 (11.8)	14 (32.3)

The significant relationship between the tools pictured in the drawings and type of school indicated by chi-square (0.09 > 0.05). The children in public school pictured more tools of violence (gun and knife) while describing violence.

Table 7. Distribution of violence tools according to gender

	Gun n (%)	Knife n (%)	No tool n (%)
Female	5 (21.7)	0	18 (78.3)
Male	1 (3.7)	3 (11.1)	23 (78.6)

The significant relationship between the tools pictured in the drawings and gender is indicated by chi-square (0.05 > 0.05). The majority of children drawing gun in the drawings are girls. The boys and girls, in general, do not picture tools of violence.

Table 8. The characteristics of perpetrators

Perpetrator	n	%
Male stranger	18	36
Older brother	5	10
Boy/peer	9	18
Girl/peer	2	4
Mother	3	6
Father	7	14
Sportsman	2	4
Female stranger	1	2
Tornado (natural disaster)	1	2
Father and older brother	2	4
Family members	17	34
Peer	11	22
Stranger adults	21	42
Tornado	1	2

It is stated that the majority of perpetrators are pictured as adult male in the children's drawings.

Nearly, 34% of the perpetrators in the drawings are family members and 42% are male stranger and 22% are peers.

Table 9. The characteristics of the victims

Characteristics	n	%
Daughter of the family	5	10
Son of the family	7	14
Mother	3	6
Father	1	2
Pet	1	2
Mother and pet	1	2
Parents and children	1	2
Mother and children	2	4
Female stranger	6	12
Male stranger	6	12
Girl (among peers)	9	18
Boy (among peers)	6	12
Sportsman	2	4

Considering the gender of the victims on the drawings, it is seen that 50% are women, 46% are men and 3.57% are pet; 57.1% are children and 39.2% are adults. In the drawings of the children, 24% of the victims are adult strangers (they were mentioned as 'a woman' and 'a man' in the children's written descriptions) and 16% are parents. Nearly, 3.57% of children reflected the violence at animals.

Table 10. The violence against children in pictures

	Female n (%)	Male n (%)
In the family	8 (25)	9 (28.12)
At school (among peers)	9 (28.12)	6 (18.5)

The children who are pictured as victims of the domestic violence in the drawings are 25% female and 28.12% male. The children who are victims of the violence at school among peers are 28.12% female and 18.75% male.

Table 11. The human figure in drawings

	Stick figures/incomplete drawings n (%)	Drawing in details/complete n (%)
Public school	21 (63.6)	12 (36.6)
Private school	4 (23.5)	13 (76.4)

In drawings of children in public school, human figures are stick figures and incomplete; in the drawings of children at private school, the human figures are mostly pictured in details.

Table 12. The other drawings in the pictures

Other Drawings	n (%)
Flower	3 (6)
Sun	18 (36)
Cloud	14 (28)
Tree	3 (6)
Heart	5 (10)
House/building/furniture	11 (22)
Road/car/traffic lights	4 (8)

Apart from human figures sun, cloud and house (building and furniture) are frequently reflected on the pictures. In 32% of pictures, another drawing is not seen apart from human figures related to the topic.

4. Discussion

When the pictures of the children are examined, one can see that they mostly pictured the topic of domestic violence. The father applying violence to the mother and the children, mother to the child and older sibling to the younger sibling are reflected to the pictures. This finding indicates that the fact

that children witness violence in the family and/or experience violence. The family is a unit which provides the basic needs of the child such as care, nutrition and the feeling of trust and protects and improves the child's physical and mental health (Aktas, 2006). Therefore, the most harmful violence experience for the child's self- development is, undoubtedly, the violence applied by the relatives in other words the violence in the family (Godenzi, 1994). Since the children participated in the research due to their developmental stage are in the effort to reflect the reality as it is, this phenomena is quite thought-provoking (Isbell & Raines, 2003)

World Health Organization defines domestic violence as 'violence largely between family members and intimate partners usually though not exclusively, taking place in the home' (World Health Organization, 2002). Stewart and Robinson on the other hand defines domestic violence as 'Corruption of the individual's life, body, psychological integrity or freedom in the family by using force' (1998, p. 38). According to the research conducted by World Health Organization, domestic violence occurs in all cultures and at every level of society. Considerable number of women indicated that at some point in their lives they are exposed to physical violence by their spouses and at the same time it is emphasised that the women exposed to the multiple acts of violence and usually experienced more than one type of abuse (World Health Organization, 2002).

One of the most extensive research studies of domestic violence conducted in Turkey with a total of 1,800 women from 56 provinces. According to the striking result of the research, one out of every three woman subjected to physical violence, one out of every six men who has higher education commit violence on their spouse and half of the woman who are subjected to the violence had never before spoken to anyone about this situation (Altinay and Arat, 2007). The victims of domestic violence are usually women and children. Undoubtedly, the children's witnessing the violence between their parents is a significant type of violence which damages the child's psychosocial and self-development (Godenzi, 1994).

In a study conducted in Turkey, it is emphasised that the history of childhood physical violence is significantly correlated with being the perpetrator of child abuse (Vahip and Doganavsargil, 2006). In great number of research studies, the boys who expose and witness violence in the family are more at a risk of perpetrating violence towards their spouses in later years (Altinay & Arat, 2007; Ammon, 1979; Godenzi 1994; Vahip & Doganavsargil, 2006). According to the research studies, girls' witnessing violence between their parents increases the risk of positioning themselves in relations which holding violence in later years.

In the pictures of children participated in the research, another topic of violence is violence experienced among peers. In most of the research studies, it is obvious that in children who are exposed to continuous and repetitive violence incidents among peers psychosomatic symptoms and psychopathologic problems like depression can be identified (Kumpulainen & Rasanen, 2000; Piskin, 2002). Since the violence among peers is mostly experienced at school, it can lead to many problems such as turning away from school, decrease in academic performance and anxiety disorder. The children participated in the research pictured in their drawings behaviours such as children insulting, mocking, spitting, pushing and hitting each other which suggested peer bullying. Roland and Muntle (1989) indicates that peer bullying is a concept which is hard to be defined and can range from name calling, mocking, sexual abuse, frequent fights to physical violence resulting in death. At the same time, there are many studies which suggest a relationship between school bullying and domestic violence (Ammon, 1979; Genc, 2007; Maxwell & Maxwell, 2003; Olweus, 1993).

In the drawings of the children participated in the research, the other topics pictured are situations as usual fights and discussions taken place between adults, traffic, violence at animals and terror. These topics are considered to be related with the media. In the research studies, it is indicated that the violent incidents are included mostly on television (Erdogan & Alemdar, 1990). Studies conducted in last 10 years indicate that the traditional media violence is transferred to computer and internet

technologies namely virtual environment (Bushman & Huesmann, 2006). It is known that there is an increase in aggressive and violent behaviours of children who are exposed to effects of violence in virtual environment (Anderson & Bushman, 2001). There are studies which suggest the violence containing games in virtual environment lead the children to commit violence in real-life conditions especially in case of excitement, anger or anxiety (Grossman& Christensen, 2004). In the drawings of children participated in the research, especially, the children from public school which represents middle socio-economic class, physical violence is included more. This finding overlaps with the other research studies. It is indicated that domestic violence is experienced more in middle class families and there is a relationship between the education level of men, being unemployed and having unstability of work life with the physical violence in the family (Castro, Peek-Asa & Ruiz, 2003; Eisikovits, Winstok & Fishman, 2004). Domestic violence usually committed to woman and children by the man, or the woman towards children is not restricted only to physical violence. If physical violence is experienced in the family, it means that at the same time emotional and verbal violence is also committed. This kind of picture establishes 'a violence circle consists of mechanisms which feed and reproduce each other' (Ilkkaracan, Gulcur & Arin, 1996, p. 25.)

In drawings of children which represent middle socio-economic class reflected the violent incidents mostly in playground, garden and homes where as in drawings of children which represents a higher socio-economic class the violence is pictured in the shopping area, at traffic and at undefined settings. The violent incidents that take place in places like garden and playground resembles the peer bullying. In the research studies conducted, it is indicated that school gardens and parks are one of the most common places for bullying (Egbochuku, 2007; Fekkes, Pijpers & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005). This finding indicates that the counselling practices intended to control the chidren's behaviours to each other in mentioned locations and prevent such acts need to be improved. The absence of psychological counselling and guidance services and school psychologists in public primary schools in Northern Cyprus can be one of the factors which set ground for peer bullying. It is important for the school counsellor to raise students' awareness about violence, to improve their coping ability, to detect the students who are exposed to violence, to be educated about the actions to be taken, to be able to identify the students who penetrate violence, to be able to have interview with the students who are exposed to violence and who penetrated the violence and to include the families to the active process.

In the majority of pictures used in the research, the tool of violence is not pictured and in 18% of pictures gun and knife is drawn. Contrary to the information in literature, it is remarkable that in girls' pictures, the gun is drawn more. The children need play and toys for their cognitive, physical and psychosocial development. Gun is one of the toys which mostly played by boys. There are plenty of biological and socio-cultural views trying to explain this fact (Fett, 1980). For boys gun is a growing power and a tool which creates the feeling of being strong, brave and safety. With their toy guns, they try to cope with the situations which evoke anxiety and anger on daily basis. They assume that they can control the world even life and death with their guns. This feeling comforts them for a while. By means of guns, they express their inner discontentments and obtain momentary relief. In spite of being small and weak they feel independent, brave and powerful enough to affect the world. Actually, while playing with a gun their goal is not to injure or kill someone but only to feel themselves powerful and to be able to cope with their problems (Dolto, 1983). Girls grow up by identifying themselves with their mothers and it is quite important for them to establish and maintain new relationships in the process of identity formation. Boys after a while to form their identity try to differentiate from their mother and identify with their father. However, while doing this, they need to repress their strong infancy bonds with their mothers. According to Chodonous (1978), this situation causes the relationship of men to begin in a problematic way. May be, for this reason, they need more solid tools such as guns. It is not possible to say that girls do not execute aggression or they do not desire to feel themselves powerful. While the boys welcome the children of the guests at home with his toy gun, the girls welcome them with a smiling

face but then they can say 'we do not let you play with us because we do not like you'. When the girls get angry with their dolls and punish them, they express their own restlessness (Bettelheim, 1987). The gun which is not among the plays of the girls and probably perceived as terrifying, is much more normalised by the boys. Probably, because of that the children participated in this research and draw guns are mostly girls. Because, the gun is terrifying for them.

In the pictures used in the research, 40% of the perpetrator of violence are strange male, 34% are relatives and 22% are peers. Mostly male figures are included as perpetrator of violence and this overlaps with the literature (Delfabbro et al., 2006; Godenzi, 1994; Koc, 2006). This finding indicates that the children mostly observe, witness male perpetrators of violence or experience violence with them. In many research studies conducted, it is indicated that mostly males commit bullying behaviours (Kapikiran & Fiyakali 2003; Olweus, 1993; Piskin, 2006; Rigby & Slee, 1999; Sapouna, 2008). According to the attachment theorist Bowlby (1980), the child who grows up without having nurturing responses to their needs and signals from the attachment person (generally mother), when they become adults they experience the fear of abundance deeply and used the violence as a tool to avoid close relationships which has potential to hurt them. When the pictures used in the research are examined, it is seen that 50% of the participants to violence are female and 46.4% are male. In total, 57% of victims are children and 39% are adults. This finding indicates that the perception of children related to experience of violence is not that much different than the real research results. The previous studies indicate that people from all age groups and gender are exposed to the violence and especially women and children are more victimised (Krug, Dahlberg & Mercy 2002). When the violent incidents towards children in the pictures are examined, it is seen that 53.12% children experience violence in the family and 46.87% experience among peers. The violence factors reflected to the pictures should be taken seriously. Raising the awareness of family, school and society is essential for healthy psychological development of the children. Apart from the violent incidents pictured on the children's drawings in the research other drawings as yellow sun, blue cloud and houses are frequently pictured. According to Di Leo (1983), children from all countries and cultures draw sun, trees, greenery and houses to feel happy. In a research about the children who has experienced earthquake among the drawings a picture of black sun was found. The black sun was interpreted as the expression of situations as darkness, fear, terror and hopelessness (Malchiodi, 2005). While the drawings related with the sun and nature is an expression of the need for a world which is restricted by the house, the house represents a place for compassion and safety in the family life. Generally, the sun in the sky and the clouds can be interpreted as figures which define the happiness (Burns & Kaufman, 1972). Some of the children who participated in the research by drawing sun, cloud and houses may reflect the polarities of the violence phenomena; happiness, trust and compassion. In the pictures of children participated in the research, 63.6% of children in public school which represents middle socio-economic class and 23.5% of children in private school which represents higher socio-economic class pictured human figures as stick figures and incomplete. According to this result, the effect of the environment and school to cognitive performance is obviously seen. According to the results of other studies, it is detected that the environment and the quality of the education at school plays a significant role on visuo-spatial performance (Kagitcibasi & Gulgoz, 2004; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2001).

Based on the results, we can assume that the public schools in North Cyprus have to be improved academically and in both public and private schools the psychological counselling and guidance departments have to be developed and supported. Many factors in the childhood may cause violence to be experienced. Situations as moving frequently, losses, breakdown of the family, poverty, urban life, improper adjustment in school life, not giving importance to the communication, instead of using language to express feelings using it in a manipulative way, caught up in material things in the family, emotional deprivation are important risk factors which cause the children to expose to violence and commit violence.

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